



D-E NCA Advisory Council Minutes

April 6, 2011

The Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Advisory Council met in the Mesa County Courthouse Annex.

All Advisory Council members present except for Jason Beason of Paonia, and Jan McCracken of Delta. Those attending:

- William (Bill) Harris of Montrose
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Tamera Minnick of Grand Junction
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Joe Neuhoof of Grand Junction
- Terry Kimber of Delta
- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Andy Windsor, and Brodie Farquhar. Catherine Robertson and Dave Kauffman each attended part of the meeting.

This meeting was well-attended by the general public, with over 20 persons signing in.

Chairwoman Katie Steele called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. and noted there was a quorum. She asked D-E NCA Manager Katie Stevens, the designated federal official for the council, to remind the Council about the process that was agreed upon at the last meeting in Delta. Stevens reminded the audience that the Advisory Council was established by the Omnibus Act, which created D-E NCA. Stevens said the role of the Council is to provide advice to the BLM. She explained that the Council will start having two meetings a month (first and third Wednesdays) beginning in May.

Steele called upon council members and over 20 members of the public to introduce themselves. Steele then opened the first round of public comment.

Public Comment:

Lee Gelatt, a community organizer with Western Colorado Congress, said he also represented a new Quiet Trails Group, a coalition of equestrians, hikers, the Sierra Club, Great Old Broads for Wilderness

and other conservation groups. He presented a three-page memo to the Advisory Council – suggestions and comments for the Council’s consideration of Hunting Grounds (Zone 1) issues.

Janice Shepherd, a BLM volunteer and Great Old Broads member, identified concerns with an existing informal shooting area that may lack a sufficient backdrop to stop wayward bullets.

Steve Chapel, Western Slope ATV Association president, urged the Council and BLM to give extra weight to the opinion of D-E NCA’s neighbors.

James Solomon, of the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, presented a 2009 economic study of OHVs to the state economy. The executive summary is available at www.cohvco.org.

Wild and Scenic Update

Council member Mike Wilson said the Gunnison Basin Wild & Scenic stakeholders hope to wrap up deliberations by May 1, and have not made any recommendations as of yet.

Zone 1 (Hunting Grounds) Powerpoint Presentation

To begin the discussion of which topics the Advisory Council will focus on in their initial work, Stevens and Windsor provided the Council members with a summary of data relevant to each of the NCA’s purposes, as they occur in Zone 1:

Geology and Paleontology

Current Condition:

- Predominantly Dakota/Burro Canyon and Mancos Shale
- Smaller areas made of Brushy Basin and Salt Wash, members of the Morrison Formation. (Paleontologists believe there are moderate opportunities to find fossils in the area).

Management Concerns:

- Mancos Shale is a marine deposition evaporate, which often contains excessive levels of selenium and a variety of dissolvable salts. Both components of Mancos Shale can degrade water quality when disturbed and/or irrigated.

Policy Context:

- Gunnison Basin and Grand Valley Selenium Task Forces: <http://seleniumtaskforce.org/>

Water

Current Condition:

- No perennial streams exist in Zone 1
- Large number of ephemeral streams flow east-to-west away from the Grand Mesa and into the Gunnison River
- Water quality is characterized as impaired for selenium in those creeks that flow directly into the Gunnison River through Zone 1, however, this water quality impairment is not a result of BLM management.
- Zone 1 has a scattering of springs and seeps, all of which have been developed for livestock grazing.

Natural Values (including Vegetation)

Current Condition/Management Concerns:

- The vegetation is predominately desert shrub/saltbush, which occupies 21 percent of the NCA. This vegetative community consists of:
 - Drought-resistant shrubs like shadscale, saltbush, winterfat, snakeweed and prickly pear cactus
 - Grasses include western wheatgrass, galleta grass, bottlebrush squirreltail, Indian ricegrass
 - A wide variety of forbs

- Areas in zone 1 not meeting Land Health Standards, with fair or poor condition for many indicators. These problems are largely a result of a combination of some or all of the following factors:
 - Proximity of this vegetative community to Highway 50, Whitewater, Delta and utility corridors, which cause disturbance to the area
 - Historic grazing practices between the Gunnison River and Highway 50
 - Loss of native grasses and perennial forbs
 - Infestation with cheatgrass and halogeton, which are noxious and/or invasive and can prevent the re-establishment of native plants and lead to significant soil problems.
 - Vulnerability of the soils and vegetation to prolonged drought and disturbance.
- Rare plants can be found in this zone, particularly the Colorado hookless cactus.

Colorado hookless cactus

Listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act
 Colorado hookless cactus has a strong presence throughout Zone 1.
 Habitat includes rocky hills, mesa slopes, and alluvial benches in desert shrub communities
 Elevations from 4,500 to 6,000 feet.
 Occurs primarily in the Gunnison River valley, with many near Delta.

Policy Context:

- Consult with USFWS on the plan (RMP) and on projects for hookless cactus
- Land Health Assessments: ongoing monitoring for land health issues
- Decisions typically made at the RMP level:
 - Desired outcomes for vegetation: Desired mix of vegetative types, structural stages, landscape/riparian functions to provide for native plant, wildlife habitat, and livestock forage.
 - Identify areas of ecological importance, designate priority plant species and habitats
 - Actions and area-wide restrictions needed to achieve desired conditions

Wildlife

BLM Sensitive wildlife species with potential to occupy this zone (**C = confirmed within past 10 years**, P = not documented but suitable habitat exists):

- **desert bighorn sheep (C)**
- **white-tailed prairie dogs (C)**
- burrowing owls (P)
- kit fox (P)
- **pronghorn (C)**
- ferruginous hawk (P)
- long-nosed leopard lizards (P)
- midget-faded rattlesnakes (P)
- **northern leopard frog (C)**

Management Concerns:

- Proximity of sheep allotments to reintroduced desert bighorns (although note that there are relatively fewer concerns for these allotments than for those in Escalante Canyon based on barrier of Gunnison River)

Policy/Context:

- Bighorn Sheep/Domestic Sheep disease issues:
 - Memorandum of Understanding for Management of Bighorn and Domestic Sheep,
 - CDOW Bighorn Sheep Management Plan,
 - Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies management guidelines

Cultural

- Trails are a defining/characteristic feature of this area
- This area was once used extensively by game animals moving down from the Grand Mesa to the river, which were followed by Native Americans
- A trade route trail was established by the Utes through this zone, which was likely later adopted by Spanish explorers and re-named the **Old Spanish Trail**.
- Archeologists note:
 - prehistoric camp sites and hunting blinds
 - rock art sites
 - lithic sites, where arrows, spearheads and other tools were crafted.
 - Likely high density of sites

Management Concerns or opportunities:

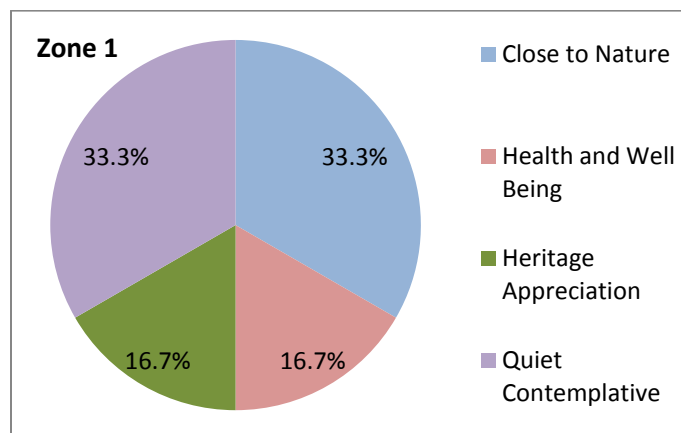
- Ease of access in this zone has led to theft and vandalism of cultural sites.
- Opportunities for cultural resource-related recreation/tourism
 - Heritage Tourism associated with the Old Spanish Trail
 - Landscape-type interpretation, showing the broad sweep of game and trade trails that intersected above and alongside the Gunnison River.

Recreation

Current Condition:

Zone 1 has not (so far) been the site of active management for recreation, and very few recreation developments are found there. The setting for this zone is classified as a mix of back country and middle country. The BLM has very little information about the number of visitors to this zone.

Current recreational activities in Zone 1 include hiking, horseback riding, ATV and motorcycle riding, trials motorcycle riding, mountain biking, target shooting, dispersed camping, and wildlife viewing. Mesa State's survey identified hiking and horseback riding as the most satisfying activities in this zone. Survey results by Mesa State show that Zone 1 is used most by Quiet Contemplative and Close to Nature niche bundles. The results are:



Travel Management

- All the routes, except for maintained county roads, were created to provide access for livestock grazing or were user-created.
- Area has been designated “Limited to Existing” for motorized vehicles -- limited to existing roads and trails, with no seasonal limits
- No “open” areas, where cross-country travel is allowed
- Popular access routes include Bean Ranch Road, Bridgeport Road and Escalante Canyon Road

Grazing

Current Condition:

Zone 1 has been developed for livestock grazing, with 11 water developments (i.e. stock ponds, pipelines or catchments), 5 fence lines or enclosures and 2 cattle guards currently in the BLM’s Range Improvement Projects database.

- Cattle grazing allotments: Bean, Kannah Creek Individual and Kannah Creek Commons.
- Sheep grazing allotments: Wells Gulch, Alkali Flats and Antelope

Management Concerns:

- Areas not meeting land health
- Understanding issue of domestic/bighorn sheep interaction

Policy Context:

- Grazing decisions typically made at the allotment level (more specific than RMP)
- Decisions typically made at the RMP level:
 - Identification of lands available/not available for livestock grazing (considers other uses for the land, terrain characteristics, soil/vegetation/watershed characteristics, presence of undesirable vegetation, presence of other resources requiring special management)

Public Safety/Law Enforcement

Public scoping comments identified public safety/law enforcement as a concern in Zone 1. These concerns related to the presence of trash, particularly glass, and suspicions of illegal activity in this zone.

Council Comments

In response to the overview of Zone 1 information, council members discussed the following issues:

- **Massey** noted multiple factors that can lead to disease in bighorns, and Stevens noted the need to have a more comprehensive discussion where all relevant information could be examined, at a future meeting.
- **Kimber** and **Aquafresca** pointed out apparent correlations between selenium soils and grazing issues with differences in land health information.
- **Harris** spoke of petroglyphs in Zone 1 and expressed optimism that good education efforts would decrease vandalism of rock art.
- **Neuhof** noted the presence of many one-way trails that paralleled each other to the same destinations. He also suggested that numerous trail spurs could be blocked for motorized traffic and allocated to quiet users. **Harris** noted the value of mixed-use trails, noting that there are no specific non-motorized use trails in Zone 1.

Public Comment, Round Two

Shepherd said it would be great if D-E NCA could be glass free. She said a nearby Utah county has had good luck banning glass.

Jim Solomon, along with other motorized recreationists, urged the Council to make field trips into D-E NCA, many of whom offered logistical assistance. He urged BLM to replicate a Gunnison Gorge NCA facility, which was so nice that it encouraged more compliance among visitors.

Bean Ranch Road

Several specific and detailed comments from members of the public noted concerns and tradeoffs with additional traffic that could occur, depending on whether new facilities were ultimately recommended along Bean Ranch Road, and noted several other specific options for locating such facilities closer to Bridgeport, should they be approved.

What Next?

Council members concluded the meeting by discussing how best to focus on D-E NCA issues. Several noted the tension between desiring a high level of detail, balanced against questions of proper time and focus given the large volume of information to be absorbed.

Discussions focused on the following action steps/considerations:

- Decide what issues to address and in what order.
- How deep do we go? Request for BLM to place their concerns on the table and have further issue identification from the BLM.
- Existing field office plans could be a starting point, but they're also inadequate –NCA raises the bar for resource protection
- Don't have much time, but should take a look at all the zones, maybe reviewing the range of alternatives in other plans
- Could look at the access issue and filter everything through that (but how do we know what needs to be protected?)

In further discussion, Council members agreed to write down their top three individual issues and forward to Steele, who will incorporate those interests into a more focused identification of known issues identified by BLM during preliminary analyses to guide the May meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held May 4, 3 p.m. in Delta, at the Delta Performing Arts Center, 822 Grand Avenue.